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One-way West Cliff Drive pilot advances in Santa Cruz

By Jesse Kathan | February 28, 2023 | Tags: [City of Santa Cruz](#), [Santa Cruz City Council](#), [West Cliff Drive](#)



The Santa Cruz City Council on Tuesday advanced a pilot project to make parts of West Cliff Drive one-way. (Kara Meyberg Guzman – Santa Cruz Local file, with aerial support from LightHawk)

SANTA CRUZ >>The Santa Cruz City Council on Tuesday advanced a pilot program for one-way traffic and repairs on West Cliff Drive. Sections near Columbia Street and David Way have been closed to vehicles since they were battered by storms in January.

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The council unanimously voted to:

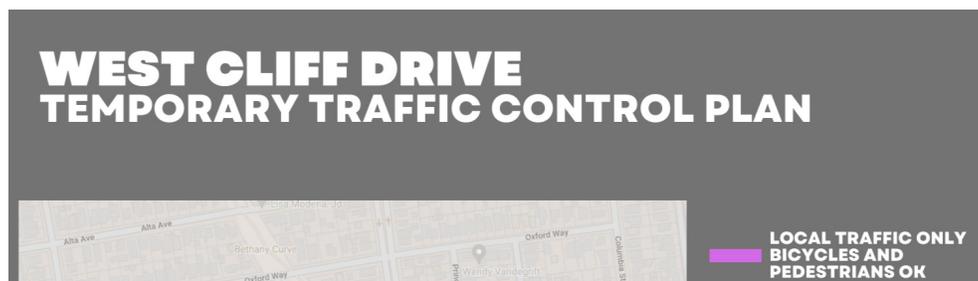
- Create a one-way pilot program for West Cliff as part of a potential long-term plan.
- Retroactively approve emergency roadwork and signs.
- Begin planning urgent storm repairs.

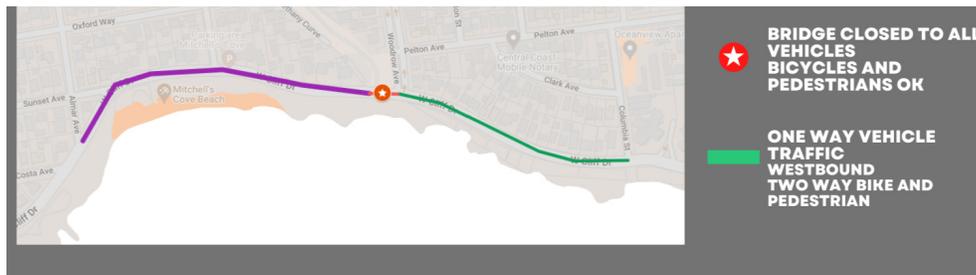
The council also funded \$700,000 from the emergency reserve of the General Fund to pay for:

- Installation of barriers and street stripes from January.
- More signs and other protective measures in the coming months.
- A contract with an engineering consulting firm to design a one-way pilot project.

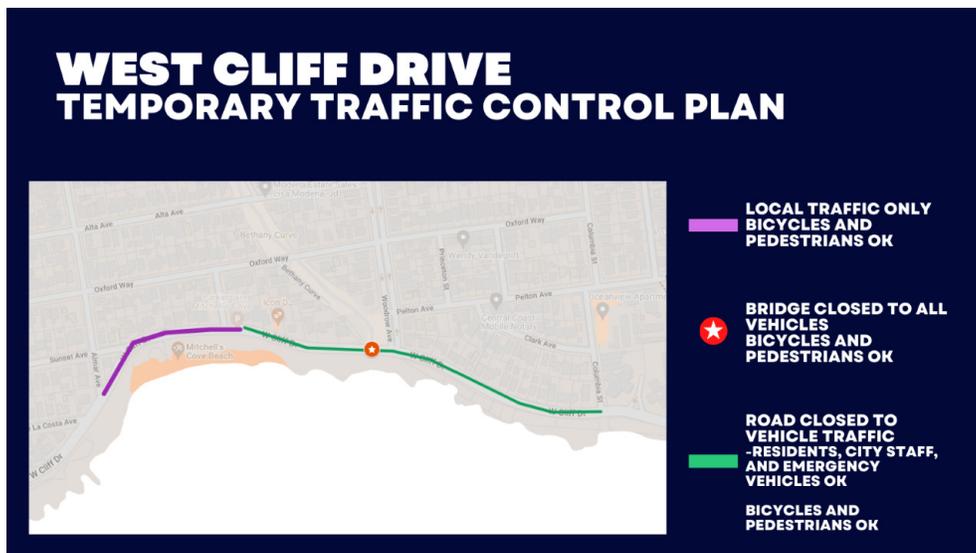
Initial damage estimates to West Cliff are more than \$5 million, [according to a staff report](#). City leaders are applying for reimbursement from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Federal Highway Administration.

From Dec. 31 to Jan. 4, big surf and high tides pummeled parts of the cliff and displaced about 500 tons of concrete riprap along the shore, said Santa Cruz Public Works Director Nathan Nguyen.





A traffic proposal from February would introduce one-way vehicle traffic on West Cliff Drive from Woodrow Avenue to Columbia Street. (City of Santa Cruz)



A plan from January diverted West Cliff Drive traffic at Almar Avenue and at Columbia Street. (City of Santa Cruz)

Although the city has anticipated ongoing erosion to coastal cliffs, the storms were so powerful that they caused levels of damage that staff weren't expecting to see for decades, said Assistant City Manager Laura Schmidt.

To inform the one-way pilot program, city staff will gather data on traffic patterns surrounding the closure, said Nguyen. In May, staff are expected to return to the council with a plan for one-way vehicle traffic, two-way cyclist and pedestrian access, and detour traffic.

The West Cliff Drive Adaptation and Management Plan, **adopted by the council in 2021**, calls for a potential reduction of vehicle traffic from two-way to one-way. The plan aims to adapt public works projects to sea-level rise and coastal erosion. A pilot program

projects to sea level rise and coastal erosion. A pilot program “would transition from temporary repairs to explore a possible bridge to a longer-term recovery option,” city staff **wrote in a report.**

City staff are planning surveys and outreach events for West Cliff residents and other city residents who drive through the neighborhood, Schmidt said.

Planned informational events include:

- **March 2:** Paradise in Peril at London Nelson Community Center.
- **March 4:** Museum of Natural History What’s up with the Weather Storm Resource Fair.
- **March 16:** Democratic Women’s Club’s Community Climate Conversation at Cabrillo College.
- **April 22:** Earth Day in Downtown Santa Cruz.

Onlookers survey West Cliff Drive damage on Jan. 8. (TR Dreszer – file)

Repair to take months

Even urgent repairs to the road “will take months and probably even years to complete,” Schmidt said.

From mid May until the end of August, staff will create a prioritized plan of repair projects and look for sources of funding, Schmidt said. Implementing the plans, and receiving the necessary funds, could take 10 years or longer, she said. The city has also hired

Sacramento-based climate resilience consultant firm Farallon Strategies LLC to help create a long-term roadmap for West Cliff and identify funding sources.

Schmidt emphasized the need for an urgent and sustained effort to preserve West Cliff. “If we do nothing, it will literally disintegrate into the ocean,” she said.

Neighbors voice concerns with traffic

At Tuesday’s council meeting, nine residents who live near West Cliff raised concerns about detoured traffic. Signs direct detoured traffic to Almar, Delaware, and Woodrow avenues. Eastbound traffic is detoured to Pelton Avenue and Columbia Street.

Multiple residents said drivers are speeding, running stop signs and using unapproved shortcuts through side streets like Oxford Way. “Drivers are not paying attention to signage,” said Bob Goldbeck. “It’s a big mess. It’s not safe for motorists, bicycles or pedestrians.”

In response to public concerns and questions from council members, City Manager Matt Huffaker said city leaders would speak with city police about increasing enforcement of traffic rules in the West Cliff neighborhood.

Al Ramadan, a founder of the community group Save West Cliff, said he hopes the long-term plan “moves us from a short-term focus of protecting the road to a longer term view of protecting the recreation area as a whole.”

“West Cliff is more than a road with pipes under it,” he said. “It is a living ecosystem with a very rich history.”

Living wage increase

The city council on Tuesday also approved an increase in the **city’s living wage** to take effect July 1. The wage applies to the employees of contractors who work with the city.

- The minimum hourly wage for workers who receive minimum sick leave, vacation leave, and health insurance benefits is set

sick leave, vacation leave and health insurance benefits is set to increase to \$20.22 per hour. The current minimum wage is \$19.01. Workers who don't receive those benefits will be paid a minimum of \$22.06 per hour.

The council also approved a grant application for the California Interagency Council on Homelessness.

- The city asked for \$6.2 million over two years, said Homelessness Response Manager Larry Imwalle.
- The grant application is an attempt to find longer-term funding for the city's temporary shelters. Two city shelters at 1220 River St. and at the National Guard Armory near DeLaveaga Golf Course are funded through June with **one-time state money**. The grant would fund temporary shelter for 100 people, outreach efforts and case management, according to a staff report.

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